

For Parents: Children's Anxiety (Avoiding, Clinging, Fears)



What You Should Know

When children are frightened, they need to take back control of their feelings. They may not understand that their present fear is connected to the disaster. Remind them that they didn't have strong scary feelings before the event and that the feelings will not be strong forever. Also, point out that the event is over and the danger of the event is no longer present. Helping your child understand the connection between the scary feelings they are having and the anxious ways they are behaving can lead them to taking control of themselves.

What Can Help

- **Maintain daily routines.** Don't agree to avoid places and activities that are part of your child's daily life. This will not help your child overcome anxiety.
- **Talk with your child's teachers when he/she resists going to school.** Ask teachers to be sympathetic—but firm—as you drop off the child in the morning.
- **Engage children in confidence-promoting activities.** Remind your child of his/her competence and capabilities by assigning special tasks at home.
- **Watch for new areas of anxiety or anxious behavior.** Help your children talk about the worry that drives the behavior and discuss ways to help him/her feel better.
- **Give children a reality check.** Remind them that their present situation is safe (e.g., mom and dad will be safe when the child doesn't see them; the rooms of the house are safe).
- **Remind children of the connection between their behaviors and feelings.** Then talk about the feelings during the disaster and the new worries that have developed since the event.

When Children Are Extremely Nervous or Panicky

- **Help them calm.** If they are young or wish to be held, hold them. If they are sobbing and breathless, tell them to breathe slowly with you.
- **Practice slow, relaxed breathing:**
 - "Put your hand on your stomach when you breathe in and notice how it sticks out like a balloon filling up with air. Breathe in slowly as you count to three: one . . . two . . . three. Think about your favorite color and all the good things that are that color."
 - "When you breathe out, feel your stomach shrinking back in, like when a balloon loses air. Breathe out slowly as you count to five: one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five. Think about the color gray and all the upsetting feelings leaving your body."
 - "Great! Now do this a few more times."